

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, and students -- good morning.

In a speech last week in Washington, Secretary of State John Kerry emphasized that the United States Government has put advancing the status of women and girls at the center of United States foreign policy. Women's issues are everyone's issues. They are family, economic, security and justice issues. The United States works with partners around the globe to boost maternal health, strengthen female business owners, and prevent and address gender-based violence. All societies benefit when women are healthy, safe,

and can contribute their labor, leadership, and creativity to the global economy.

Secretary Kerry called International Women's Day a time when each of us must recommit to ending gender inequality around the world so that every woman and girl can live up to her full potential. The United States Embassy in Nassau takes this challenge seriously and supports the work of the Government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas and civil society organizations engaged in strengthening the rights of all individuals.

For the last seven years in honor of International Women's Day, the United States Government has asked its embassies around the world to nominate one female leader for the International Women of Courage Award. We are honored to have with us today two previous award winners. In 2012, the Embassy recognized The Honorable Janet Bostwick, a Bahamian national and "matriarch of women's rights." In 2010, The Embassy honored Dr. Sandra Dean Patterson, founder and director of The Crisis Center. Please join me in a round of applause in honor of these two women for their perseverance in the

struggle to address inequalities faced by women in The Bahamas.

Today, however we are gathered to recognize the achievements of yet another Bahamian woman of courage. On behalf of the United States Embassy, I would like to present the 2013 Woman of Courage Award to Missouri Sherman Peter. Ms. Sherman Peter has shown courageous leadership in advocating women's rights and empowerment throughout her 40 years of public service in national government and multinational organizations.

Ms. Sherman Peter is the personification of the possibilities that have been created for Bahamian women. Through courageous and selfless acts, she and her contemporaries broke through barriers in education, politics, government and labor to create opportunities that were previously closed to women born only a generation earlier.

It is not an exaggeration to say that, because of the accomplishments of women like Missouri Sherman Peter, the opportunities afforded to Bahamian girls today are only limited by their own imaginations.

To bring this point home I would like to take a moment to speak directly to two of our guests here today – Miss Lonelle Sweeting from Temple Christian School and Miss Christina Mounts from Queens College. Young ladies, I would encourage you to look closely at Ms. Sherman Peter, and for that matter at Mrs. Bostwick and Dr. Peterson, and see what your future holds. I am confident that I speak for them when I tell you that just as they have stood on the shoulders of great Bahamian women who went before them, so should you look not just to emulate the accomplishments but to exceed

them. You and your contemporaries are the hope of this nation and can do no greater service to these great women than to commit to the same standards of excellence to which they have been true.

So it is with a much gratitude and great admiration that I ask all of you to please join me in welcoming to the podium the Embassy of the United States 2013 International Woman of Courage recipient, Ms. Missouri Sherman Peter.